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ABSTRACT

The countries of Hungary and Poland are steadily moving along the road of transition from their recent totalitarian past to modern capitalist democracies. Hungary and Poland are changing, developing economies based on new principles, resolving multiple social issues, and patching the projection from their history that still casts a shadow on the developing democratic image. Today's generation cannot be responsible for the unfair treatment and numerous atrocities committed by their historical compatriots towards Jewish and Gypsy citizens during World War II. This lesson plan focuses on the Holocaust and its ramifications. The lesson plan states educational objectives; gives materials needed; details procedures and activities; and provides 10 discussion questions. It also contains extensive explanatory and informational materials about the Holocaust. (BT)

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Fulbright-Hays Summer Seminar Abroad
Hungary and Poland
June-August 2002

OF MEN AND MORALS

(Investigating Human Behavior)

Resources for courses in World History,
World Literature, Journalism, Psychology

(for high schools and community colleges)

Presented by A. Shuhgalter
Palisades Charter High School,
Pacific Palisades, California

SO 034 473

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A.Shuhgalter

Introduction

Love and Hatred as well as Compassion and Cruelty accompanied History throughout thousands of years. Empires came to life and fell into the Lethe, new religions were born and gained power, peoples migrated from continent to continent, great revolutions and wars shook the world, and social justice hatched through noble ideas and struggle... Yet there have been some things that never changed: Love and Hatred as well as Compassion and Cruelty...

During my trip to Hungary and Poland in a group of educators who were selected to participate in Fulbright-Hays Seminars Abroad, I heard stories, lectures and presentations, met with some people who tried to improve distant and recent images in their national history, and with others who were objective in their thoughtful analysis of the past.

It is always difficult for Love to rise above Hatred, not because Love is weaker, but because Hatred proved to be so common. It is always Compassion that remains a minority amidst numerous Cruelties. It is always for Man to choose one of the two in the times of human catastrophe. It is also true that history is subject to either search for truth and historical fairness or oblivion and indifference on the part of a new generation.

Today's Hungary and Poland are countries that are steadily marching up the road of Transition from their recent totalitarian past to modern capitalist democracies. Both countries had a lot to share: glorious wars and common kings, agricultural past, disintegration and loss of independence, distinct nationalism to preserve their identity, a short period of stability and relative prosperity, occupation by Nazi, so-called "liberation" by the Soviet Union, which came only to establish its own despotic regime, Stalin purges, anti-Semitism, and social calamities. Both the Hungarian and Polish peoples are proud of their cultural heritage and the geniuses whose wonderful works enriched human civilization.

Clearly, Hungary and Poland are changing, trying to heal their historical wounds, develop economy based on new principles, resolve multiple social issues, and patch the unsightly projection from their history that still casts a shadow on the developing democratic image. I respect their desire to become truly free countries. How can one not? I don't doubt they will succeed. I wish their people prosperity and peace. The two nations have suffered enormously in their past.

On the road of Transition, many things seem to have changed... However, the burden of the past will haunt the image of the future unless there is a desire and will to reconcile with true history. Today's generation cannot be responsible for the unfair treatment and numerous atrocities committed by their historical compatriots towards Jewish and Gypsy citizens, but the old ethnic arrogance, is it history in human relationship?

In Krakow, Dr. Andrzej Bryk from Jagiellonian University stated that Eli Wiesel was wrong, Hollywood movies misrepresented Poland and Israeli historians distorted the past: "Poles have never committed atrocities, and they

have nothing to atone for." As Oscar Wilde noted, "Arguments are to be avoided: they are always vulgar and often convincing."

The clearly distinctive voice that rose above nationalistic narrow-mindedness belonged to a Jesuit priest, Dr. Stanislaw Obirek. However, Dr. Obirek admitted that his views on Jews in Poland, atonement and restitutions were still uncommon among the Poles.

World War 2 staged a fiendish experiment on human values. It tested people's humanity, decency and morals in Germany and in the occupied territories where millions of people, including Poles, Russians, Jews and Gypsies were turned into recyclable material whose value, in most cases, was as good as their ashes.

The psychological transformation in many Christian minds was amazing: their majority believed in the values created by the Jews, and, at the same time, conscientiously exterminated the race of their God for reasons that no logical mind could justify, simply because that race was different and constituted a target that was easy to blame and slaughter with "blessed" Cruelty; their minority revealed the greatest examples of heroism and self-sacrifice, the noblest spirit of Humanity and Compassion.

It was not just "*a Jewish story*," according to the words of our Budapest city tour guide, "*over which I don't want to cry because I am Hungarian.*" It was a global tragedy in which Humanity lost itself when an oppressed majority betrayed, tortured and killed victims of their own prejudice and greed. It is clear that moral values and social climate in society determine on people's behavior and their acceptance of minorities. It is also clear that every minority is eager to get accepted, and only gets bitterly alienated when it is subjected to unfair treatment.

"The habit of closing our eyes and hearts to the problems of the outcasts and poor is practiced and often strengthened by the majority of a society. In the best case, society ignores the problems; the worst is when people respond to problems within minority communities with anger and employ a moral code that results in discrimination." (Hajnal Hos)

Almost 2,500 years ago, Confucius said, "There can be no discrimination among truly educated people." However, it was the controversy of "the other side" that brought me to books, movies and articles depicting Evil and Kindness in the time of the Great Test of human nature in Central Europe. The psychological aspect of *the Choice* remains eternal regardless of time and geography, and is as important in this country as elsewhere.

One of the most striking examples of human polarity was the Goering brothers. Following the Crystal Night pogrom of November 9, 1938, it was Hermann Goering who fined the German Jews community a billion marks and ordered the elimination of Jews from the German economy, the "Aryanization" of their property and businesses, and their exclusion from schools, resorts, parks, forests, etc. On November 12, 1938, he warned of a "final reckoning with Jews" should Germany come into conflict with a foreign power. It was also Hermann Goering who instructed Heydrich on 31 July 1941 to "carry out all preparations

Jewish question in those territories of Europe which are under German influence..."

His younger brother, Albert Goering, is known to a relatively small number of people. However, his place in history is next to Oscar Schindler and Raoul Wallenberg. It was Albert Goering who saved many ordinary European Jews, risking his good fortune and life. It was Albert Goering who hated Nazism and defied its Ideology and Practice for the sake of Love and Compassion.

There is no such thing as perfect human society. However, some societies evolved into truly democratic communities where laws and social norms teach people that human values are measured by human behavior rather than by skin pigmentation, physical features or historical and religious differences, and demand respect for the rights of those whose ethnic or cultural characteristics are different.

Perhaps, the most insightful statement on the complexity of the majority-minority relationship was formulated by the great Hungarian thinker of the 20th Century, Istvan Bibo, in his book of essays "The Jewish Question in Hungary After 1944:"

"In a community where the rhythm of life and social structures are ethical and consciously attuned to each other, the process of assimilation will tend to be straightforward and untainted; in a community where deception, discrepancy and disharmony prevail, the same process will be fraught with contradiction and uncertainty."

LESSON PLAN

Objectives

Students will understand the following:

1. More than half a century after the Holocaust, people are still studying it and forming opinions about the factors that led to the catastrophe.

2. Human moral values are often compromised in extreme conditions at the expense of those who are different and weaker.

3. Hate among human beings did not fade away with the end of the Holocaust.

Materials

- Computer with Internet access
- "The Painted Bird" by Jezry Kosinski
- Editorials concerning freedom of speech and hate groups in the U.S.A.
- Articles attached to this lesson
- Videos: "The Fifth Seal" and "The Shop On Main Street"

Procedures and Activities

1. Call students' attention that despite the atrocities committed during World War 2 by the Nazi in Germany and occupied territories, there are still people today who support the Nazi beliefs; there are still atrocities committed in Europe, in Africa and in Asia, which are caused by ethnic and religious differences.
2. Assign students to groups in which they will conduct research with each member checking different resources. In the debate, later in this activity, half of the group will support the premise that the theme of the Holocaust should be studied and taught in all countries as the Global Human Tragedy. The other half will support the premise that the Holocaust should be confined to museums and academic studies, and it is time to forget about the horrors and crimes of the past. During the research phase, students should not know on what side they will be asked to argue. That is, they should collect arguments on both sides of the question.
3. Direct students, working in groups, to find answers to the questions whether hate groups should or should not have freedom of speech. One significant source of information is http://www.adl.org, the Web site of the Anti-Defamation League. Suggest that during their research into the Holocaust, ethnic hatred and hate groups students use index cards to take notes.

Here are some of the questions students should research individually and then share responses to with other members of their group:

- Why were over a million Armenians slaughtered in Turkey in 1915? What is the Turkish attitude to that tragedy today?
- Why did Jews and Gypsies become targets of hatred and extermination during World War 2?
- What motivated many Ukrainians, Lithuanians, Poles, Hungarians, Germans to participate in the mass murder organized by the German Nazi? What motivated Poland to banish her Jewish citizens in 1968?
- Why did a number of Germans, Ukrainians, Poles and Hungarians prefer to risk their lives by hiding Jews in their houses?
- What kinds of beliefs do the hate groups espouse?
- What arguments have you come across for and against tolerating the existence of hate groups in the U.S.A.?
- Which makes a difference in your attitude: the skin pigmentation, the character of a person or the unusual cultural aspects of another ethnic group?
- Do you believe that America should meddle in every ethnic conflict around the world to stop a genocide?

4. When their research in print and Web sources is complete, students can be encouraged to turn to friends, relatives, and even Holocaust survivors to solicit opinions about the history of anti-Semitism in Central Europe and tolerating hate groups in this country.
5. After students have finished collecting arguments and opinions, review with them the following points regarding the nature of a debate:

   - Debaters on each side will alternate presenting arguments to support their case.
   - After all students on both sides have spoken, any member of the group may offer arguments in rebuttal, or in opposition, to the argument made by a debater on the opposite side.
   - At the end of the debate one person from each group will present a summary of that side's argument.
   - After the summaries, each member of the audience will vote for the side he or she thinks has presented the most convincing argument.

After watching the videos, "The Fifth Seal" and "The Shop On Main Street," and reading selected parts of "The Painted Bird" as well as the attached articles, organize a series of discussions. Please keep in mind that the novel contains graphic violence and sex scenes. It might be reasonable to use some parts of the book.

Discussion Questions:

1. What factors led to the Nazi Ideology taking power in Germany?
2. Why do you think millions of Germans, Hungarians, Poles, Ukrainians and others supported the anti-Jewish policy?

2. Do you believe that a tragedy similar to the Holocaust could still happen in the world today, even though the human race has already experienced it?
3. Are similar events on a smaller scale going on right now? If so, why do you think they are happening? What are the roots of intolerance?
4. Imagine what it would have been like to be a German person your age during World War 2. Why do you think it was impossible for most young people to resist the racist propaganda and not to join one of the many Hitler youth programs?
5. What was the most important thing that you understood after you read selected parts from "The Painted Bird" and watched the recommended movies?
6. Could you save a stranger? Would you risk your safety to defend an oppressed person? Would you interfere in an ethnic dispute on the weak side?
7. Discuss the argument that the Nazi soldiers "were following orders" when they committed war crimes against defenseless Polish, Hungarian, Russian, Jewish and other civilians.
8. Which do you think is a more effective way to learn about the Holocaust – through a careful analysis of historical facts or through watching such movies as "The Fifth Seal" and "The Shop on Main Street" and reading stories written by survivors?
9. It is said that we must learn about the past in order not to relive it. At the same time, however, we are told not to dwell in the past. How do you think these adages should or should not be applied to the Holocaust? Is one of them more applicable than the other? Can they both be true? Should we ignore the reluctance of many Europeans to discuss the genocide of the Jewish people or should we stop talking about Europeans' historical role in the tragedy?
10. What motivated the terrorist who attacked America on September 11, 2001, and what our response should be?

6. Play a recording of Symphony # 13, Opus 113, composed by Dmitri Shostokovich, one of the music geniuses of the 20th Century. The Symphony, also known as "Babi Yar" Symphony, is dedicated to over 30,000 Jews killed in a ravine near Kiev (the capital of the Ukraine) within two days: September 29-30, 1941. Talk with the students about the importance of art in the propaganda machine.

7. Ask students to create their propaganda materials that support the tolerance of a diverse society. It might be a poster, collage, billboard, slogan, script for radio or television. Students should view one another's finished products and discuss which are most effective and why.

8. Ask students to write about their impressions of what they learned in this lesson. Read their papers out and publish the best ones in your school newspaper.

Some of the ideas of this lesson plan are borrowed from the free project "The Holocaust Legacy" developed by Audrey Carangelo.

Recommended web sites: www.heritagefilms.com/Poland2.htm
www.heritagefilms.com/Hungary.html

TO SAVE A LIFE: STORIES OF HOLOCAUST RESCUE

"To save one life is as if you have saved the world"

the Talmud

TO SAVE A LIFE: STORIES OF HOLOCAUST RESCUE, is a previously unpublished book in which personal narratives and photographs reveal how certain individuals acting upon their own moral convictions--while endangering their own and their families' lives--saved the lives of Jewish people from Nazi-occupied Europe.

The fact of six million Jewish deaths, plus millions more of non-Jews, is well known. However, very little has been told about the approximately two million Jews who survived the Nazi era in Europe, many entirely because of aid given freely by men and women who, asking for nothing in return, sometimes died for their efforts. Estimates are that these rescuers comprised only one tenth of one percent of the population of Nazi-occupied countries.

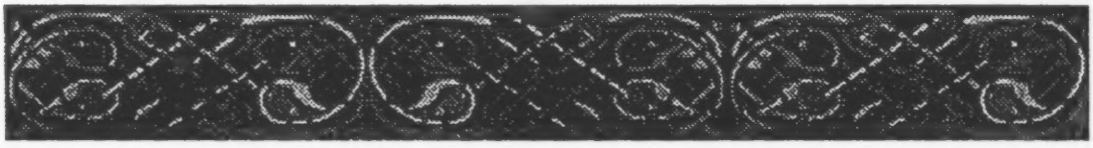
Rescuers came from every walk of life, including teachers, students, shopkeepers, factory workers, housewives, and farmers. Ages ranged from late teens to eighties. By protecting Jews they were forced into a life of deception in their daily relations with friends, neighbors, and family. For years on end they lived in constant fear of betrayal or accidental exposure, knowing full well that the most severe punishment would be the consequence of helping Jewish people, if they were caught.

The men and women who performed these incredible deeds of self-effacing heroism were quite unexceptional in most other ways; they were ordinary people who responded to extraordinary circumstances in a morally exemplary fashion. In a world forever changed by the devastating horror of the Holocaust, their personal stories provide an example for the potential of the human spirit.

In this book you will find true stories narrated by six rescuers accompanied by the narratives of thirteen people whom they rescued. Three stories take place in Holland; the others are set in Poland and Czechoslovakia. Contemporary photographic portraits of the rescuers and people whom they helped were made by the author, while vintage photographs and other documents relating to the individual rescue stories were collected from the subjects' personal albums and historical archives.

A Study in Sin and Virtue

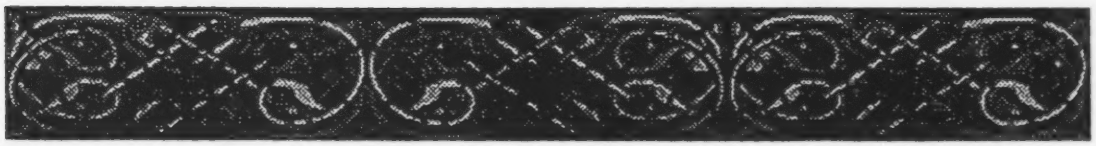
Few periods in history have the ability to simultaneously intrigue and repel us as does the Holocaust. In this lesson, we will not focus on the historical aspects of the Holocaust, but rather will look at the moral and ethical questions which it raises, for indeed the experiences of the perpetrators of the Holocaust and those victimized by them can show us both the worst and best that is in human nature-- the darkest depths of sin and depravity, as well as the potential for the greatest heights of courage, dignity and virtue. We will look at the lives of a few people who managed to resist the evil, complacency and despair around them-- who managed to maintain a sense of purpose and dignity despite the degradation and, all too often, compliance surrounding them. We will look at the lives of heroes.



Anne Frank

Anne Frank was a teenager who, with her family and four other people, was forced to go into hiding during World War II. Anne and her family remained in hiding, with many people risking their lives to keep their location secret and to bring them food and supplies, for just over two years. When the secret annex was discovered, Anne and the other Jews hiding with her were deported to concentration camps. In 1945, after almost a year in concentration camps, Anne Frank died in Bergen-Belsen; she was just fifteen years old. Two years after the war ended, Anne's diary (which had been saved by one of the people who had helped hide Anne and the others in the annex) was published. Nowadays, the diary is widely read by people, especially teenagers, in over fifty languages.

"Despite all that has happened, I still believe people are good at heart," Anne Frank wrote in her diary.



Hannah Sennesch

Hannah Sennesch was born in Hungary, where she lived with her family until she was seventeen. At that time, she made left to go to Palestine, and worked on a kibbutz there. When the Jews began to be rounded up in Hungary, and sent to concentration camps. Hannah volunteered to join a group of young Zionists (people who work for the establishment and growth of a Jewish homeland in Palestine) to parachute in central Europe and help the partisans there. In May of 1944 she reached Hungary, but was captured by the Nazis and condemned to death. Hannah knew that leaving the safety of Palestine and parachuting into war-ravaged Europe would almost certainly result in death, but she volunteered anyway, out of love for her people.

Just a few days before her capture, Hannah wrote a poem entitled "Blessed Is the Match". Now, her dream of a Jewish homeland has been realized in the State of Israel, and Israeli shool children memorize her poem.

BLESSED IS THE MATCH

Blessed is the match consumed
In kindling flame.
Blessed is the flame that burns
In the secret fastness of the heart.
Blessed is the heart with strength
to stop
Its beating for honor's sake.
Blessed is the match consumed
In kindling flame.

Janusz Korczak

Janusz Korczak was a Jewish pediatrician, writer and educator who ran an orphanage in Poland. He was known for his progresive views on education, and believed that children should be raised with the utmost love and respect for their individuality and independance. As the war progressed, Korczak and his orphans were forced to more into the ghetto, where they lived in constant danger of starvation and death from cold and disease. Even in the midst of all these sufferings, Korczak refused an opportunity to escape, not wanting to leave his children helpless. When the Nais ordered him to lead his orphans to trains going to Treblinka (a concentration camp), Korczak led them himself through the streets of the Warsaw Ghetto, holding two small children in his arms. He did not tell the children where they were going, because he didn't want them to be afraid, so he had the children sing songs as they marched along. One of the orphans walking next to him played a fiddle, and another carried a flag he had designed-- a bright banner with flowers and a Star of David. Eyewitnesses record that the children were laughing as they marched, becuse Korczak was telling them funny stories to keep them from being scared. Although he was told that he could leave the children at the platform and go, Korczak refused and stayed with the orphans, going with them to their death in the concentration camp.

"You do not leave a sick child in the night, and you do not leave children at a time like this."-- Janusz Korczak on why he would not leave his orphans behind to escape the Ghetto

10

The famous Reichmarshal Hermann Goering aided Adolf Hitler's rise to power and for years he was second in importance only to Hitler in The Third Reich. As founder of the Gestapo, Hermann Goering was instrumental in creating the first concentration camps for political dissidents and a prominent leader of the final solution, the murder of 6.000.000 Jews. Next to Hitler the man who played the largest part in the shaping of the Nazi inferno ..

But his younger brother Albert Goering loathed all of Nazism's inhumanity and at the risk of his career, fortune and life, used his name and connections to save many Jews and gentiles. The parallel with Oscar Schindler is inevitable. The story of Albert Goering, however, is almost unknown - he was shoved into obscurity by the enormity of his brother's crimes. But testimonies of survivors and a report, buried until recently in British archives, documents that Albert Goering actually saved many lives from the horrors of Holocaust.

Albert and Hermann

There were all the difference in the world between the two brothers, though they were very fond of each other. The elder Hermann with his bright blue eyes, bold, resolute and completely without fear, loved his youngest brother, Albert, who was a sad boy with doe-brown eyes, looking uncannily like his godfather, Baron Hermann von Epenstein, intimate with their mother Fanny.

All his life Albert was a man of deep moral conviction. He soon became disenchanted with the Nazis, went to Austria before 1938 and lived for a time on an allowance from von Epenstein. He worked in a film studio in Vienna and often spoke out against Adolf Hitler and the Nazis. Once the Germans marched into Austria, he might be in trouble, but Hermann Goering protected him and kept him out of the hands of the Gestapo.

Goering's List with 24 names - and Franz Lehar

As the brutality of the Nazis accelerated with murder, violence and terror, the seeds of their plan for the total extermination of the Jews dawned on Albert Goering in all its horror - he saw the Jews as mothers, fathers, children.

So he decided to act and helped many Jews escape from Vienna by procuring travel documents, among them the famous composer Franz Lehar family. Albert was arrested by the Gestapo several times, however was released with the help of this brother.

Tatiana Otzoup Guliaeff was only six years old when she saw Albert Goering, her godfather, for the last time in Vienna. Her parents and Albert were very close friends and only through the efforts of her godfather were the family able to flee with false papers.

Tatiana later told this amusing anecdote about Albert in Austria: Whenever the family would walk into a store with Albert and were able to find whatever they needed, he would always depart saying 'Gruess Gott' (God greet you), but, if the items were not to be found, he would sarcastically say: 'Heil Hitler'.

Later - as part of his job as export director of the Czech arms factory Skoda - Albert Goering was able to save many employees, among them the director Jan Moravek and his family. He protected several members of the Czech resistance and covered resistance actions.

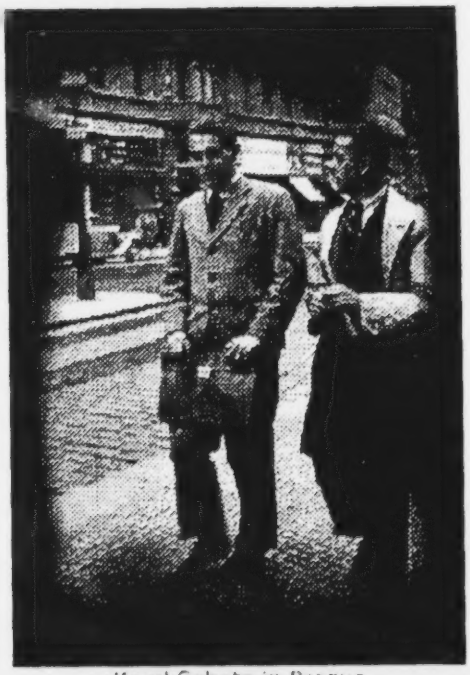
The employees were very grateful to Albert Goering due to the human treatment he always gave to all Czechs and people of other nationalities. At that time passive resistance was the order of the day. Any work in the lines of production or in the administrative area always took much more days to be done than was initially expected. Karel Sobota recalled how Albert Goering looked the other way as the Czech employees made wrong translations of catalogs, 'forgot' to do tasks assigned to them, left work unfinished in their desks or 'lost' important documents. The employees risked their lives - had they been caught red-handed by the Gestapo or the SS, they had been executed on the spot.

Albert Goering is credited with many acts of kindness, small and large. Even today survivors remember once he took off his jacket, went down on his knees, and scrubbed a sidewalk together with Jews who were ordered by the Nazis to do so in public as a humiliation. The physician Laszlo Kovacs later recalled hearing Goering say: 'I defy Hitler, my brother and all the National Socialists.'

When Albert was stationed in Bucharest, Rumania, two Nazi officers saw him standing on a balcony and recognized him as the brother of Hermann Goering. They did the Nazi salute 'Heil Hitler' in front of him, but Albert coldly replied 'you can kiss my ass ...'

Hermann Goering

After World War 2 Hermann Goering was found guilty at Nuremberg in war crimes and crimes against humanity and sentenced to death by hanging. On 15 October 1946, two hours before his execution was due to take place, he committed suicide in his Nuremberg cell, taking a capsule of poison that he had succeeded in hiding from his guards during his captivity. Shortly before he had his brother Albert promise that he would take care of his wife Emmy and his little daughter Edda.



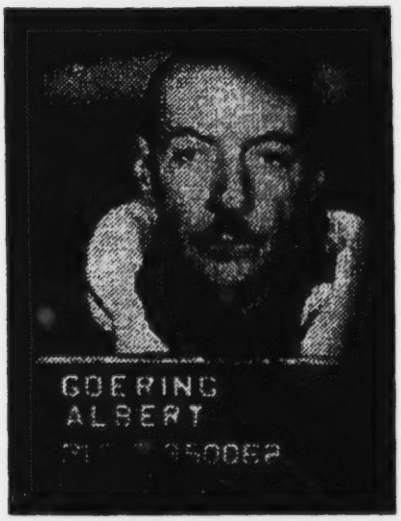
Karel Sobota in Prague

Karel Sobota, for several years assistant to Albert Goering, worked in the Exports Department of Skoda and endangered himself by taking actively part during the german occupation of Czechoslovakia, related to the Czech Resistance movement against Nazism. Karel Sobota later recalled how Albert Goering refused to return the Nazi salute when Nazi officers visited Skoda. At that time, this refusal was sufficient for one man to be imprisoned or worse.

Albert Goering insisted that all people, no matter the rank or position, be announced to him before entering his room. Karel Sobota later told how a high ranking SS officer one day arrived in Skoda and quickly entered directly in Albert Goering's room with Sobota unsuccessfully trying to block him. In a rage, Goering expelled the Nazi from his room and ordered him to wait outside. Then Goering begged Karel Sobota to come in and sit down by him, he calmly talked about the weather, his family and they both examined some of Albert's picture albums. This took about thirty or forty minutes.

Said Albert Goering: - 'Well, Herr Sobota, now it is time to let that Nachtwachter talk to me. Please allow him to come in ..' (night watcher, in german, reference to the black SS uniform).

Karel Sobota defied the Nazis



Albert Goering - saviour of victims of the tyranny his brother helped create - was imprisoned for several years after the war for his name alone. During the post-war-years he had many difficulties, the name Goering had become an almost impossible handicap. Grateful survivors, rescued by Albert Goering, helped him survive bitter years of joblessness. He married several times and died in 1966, after working as a designer in a construction firm in Munich.

Albert Goering proved that humanism knows no borders, no race, no family ties ...

Tatiana Guliaeff and her family never forgot the selfless generosity and heroism of Albert Goering, his love and compassion toward mankind. She later wrote this letter to him titled 'Onkel Baer':

Onkel Baer (Uncle Bear)

From the time I can remember I loved and cherished you, I remember every moment we were together, the walks in the parks, the treats you bestowed on me, the way you taught me to pray, always accompanying me to church, although you were a devout Catholic and I Russian Orthodox.

How hurt I was when I was forbidden to enter the study in our house, where you sat grim faced, clutching a telephone with reams of papers, pens and inkwells surrounding you. Through the mists of cigarette smoke that encircled your being, I saw you, haggard and tired, yet with a determination to fullfill some dreadful task.

Little did I know that you, at the risk of your own life, gave orders in the name of your half brother, a high ranking German official, to release prisoners, to issue exit papers to thousands of Jewish and other ethnic peoples, thus saving their lives. How you forged your half brother's name on the documents, how you changed your voice and bearing to sound like he. Neither did I know that, after saving the life of the composer of the "Merry Widow" Franz Lehar and his family, he composed an important musical piece in your honor.

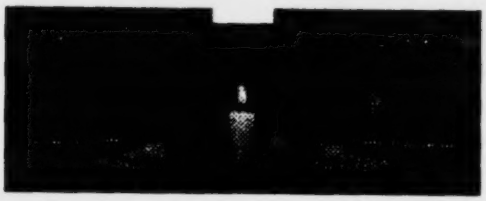
Nor did I know that you were tried in Nuremberg, absolved of all your crimes, and banished to Argentina for a number of years for your own safety, for the name of your half brother was well known and hated by all. Most of this I found out from an article written in the 1950s in the News Call Bulletin of San Francisco, where it stated that all the Jewish families, that you saved, remembered you with kindness, gratitude and respect, that they had sent affidavits to certify of your courageous actions.

To my regret, I only have one letter written by you to my mother, when you returned to Germany. Also in my possession I have a letter from your sister Olga, who wrote that as your last act of selflessness, on your deathbed, you married your housekeeper, so that she could receive your pension.

Truly we were blessed to have had you in our lives.

God rest your soul, my dearly beloved godfather, my "Onkel Baer"

Tatiana



Acknowledgement and thanks to Tatiana Otzoup Gullaeff and Jorge Sobota

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"THE FIFTH SEAL"

The Hungarian movie "The Fifth Seal" ("Az Otodik Pecset") is a study in depersonalization caused by the extreme conditions in which the characters are placed in the twilight of World War 2.

The five protagonists are close friends who try to have as much fun as possible without treading on anyone's toes. They get together once a week in a pub where they talk, play games, sip wine and smoke, enjoying the warmth of their companionship. One of the five secretly saves Jewish children in his house. At night, a Jewish kid is delivered to his house, no questions asked. The house is packed with children of different ages. The older children take care of the small ones, but He is the only person who provides them with food and Hope.

The five friends are arrested in the pub when they discussed human freedom and dignity. An overheard flippant political remark made by one of the friends insults a Hungarian Nazi Arrow Cross commandant. They are brought to prison; the one who made the offhand remark is mercilessly tortured, and the other four are offered freedom only if they slap the dying man's face to prove their loyalty to the fascist regime in Hungary.

The four friends struggle to stay in touch with their inbred ideals, which they discussed in the pub. However, the man who saves Jewish kids is torn between his moral senses and the responsibility for the lives of the children in his house. He is the only one who finally betrays his doomed friend and slaps him on his mutilated face. At dawn, he is released from prison, and he is running to his house haunted by the terrible act he has committed.

The movie was directed by one of the greatest European cinema masters, Zoltan Fabri, in 1976.

The Shop on Main Street

Movie:
The Shop on Main Street was originally released in Czechoslovakia in 1965 as *Obchod na korze*, and is now part of the Criterion Collection. The film was written and directed by Ján Kadár and Elmar Klos, with the story based on "The Trap," a short novel by Ladislav Grosman, who also wrote the screenplay.

Tono Brtko is a sad-sack peasant who haphazardly plies his trade as a carpenter in a small Czech town as the Nazi presence grows and anti-Jewish laws are brought into effect. Both Tono and his shrewish, greedy wife are elated when Tono is made the "Aryan controller" of an old Jewish widow's button shop when the law no longer allows Jews to run their own businesses. They dream of the riches they'll reap with Tono as the proprietor of a successful store, and possibly by tracking town the inevitable cache of riches they believe the old woman to have.

But Tono is in for a few unpleasant surprises: he arrives with the government order giving him the shop in hand, only to find that the old woman, Rozalie Lautmann, has such poor eyesight that she can't read it, and is so near total deafness that he can't get her to understand why he's there. She mistakenly comes to believe that he is offering his services as her assistant, through the half understood explanations of their mutual friend Mr. Kuchar. Kuchar explains to Tono that he has been duped: the shop is so run down that it's bare of merchandise, and the old woman is destitute and being supported secretly by a temple fund. Since they would rather have Tono as the Aryan controller rather than someone who would throw the old woman out, they agree to pay him a healthy monthly salary in exchange for playing along with the fiction of being her assistant.

It's not as easy as it seems: the old woman refuses to be open on the Sabbath, while being closed will bring down the wrath of the government, so Tono has to scramble to devise ways to fool everyone. And when they do have business, Tono has to play the role of his assistant for the Jewish customers, while appearing to be in charge for the Aryan ones (namely, his wife). At the same time, he sets about restoring Mrs. Lautmann's antique furniture. In time they grow fond of one another, with Tono making the necessary repairs and improvements to her home behind the shop and the shop itself, while Mrs. Lautmann cooks him motherly lunches.

But things go from bad to worse as the Nazi presence increases, and the specter of the deportation of the Jewish residents of the town looms every larger.

18

The Shop on Main Street is a brilliant, shattering film that is at once hilarious and harrowing. Ida Kaminska, who was an accomplished stage actress at the time, is a wonder to behold as Lautmann: there comes a moment in the film when Lautmann sees through her shop window all of the other Jews in the town being rounded up. Loudspeakers, which she cannot here, are announcing that they will be sent to concentration camps where they will work but not be harmed. Mrs. Lautmann has a moment of clarity, where for the first time in the movie she clearly understands what is happening while everyone else in the town is basically in the dark. In that moment alone, Kaminska's performance is breathtaking. And she is matched by Josef Kroner as Tono: he has the difficult task of making a hapless dolt, who's ultimate actions are as understandable as they are reprehensible, not only sympathetic but heartbreaking as well. And Kroner accomplishes this with amazing dexterity.

The Shop on Main Street is a masterpiece; a must-see that deservedly won the Best Foreign Language Film Oscar in 1965.

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The Painted Bird - Jerzy Kosinsky

Ø Rating: ★★★★★
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A portrait of the Nazi mentality, by the author of "Being There". A young boy, perhaps a Gypsy, perhaps a Jew, is abandoned by his parents during World War II. He is left to wander alone from one Slav village to another, sometimes being hounded and tortured and sometimes sheltered and taught.

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A hawk soaring above the sparrows

A **Very Useful** Opinion

Advantages: See text
Disadvantages: Not to everyone's tastes but they should read it anyway!
Product Rating: ★★★★★

written on 03.06.02
by MartynColebrook
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Despite having undergone a revision since the original was published in 1965, 'The Painted Bird' is still banned in Poland (Jezry Kosinski's homeland) for its subversive content and less than flattering portrayal of the Polish during World War II. I was fortunate enough to borrow a copy containing a prefatory essay by the author which explains how the title functions as an essential element of the narrative but it also supports my previous ideas about its possible biographical sources. This makes what is already a difficult novel harder when the reader realises that Kosinski may well borne witness to some of the events he recounts. As if to further the credentials of this novel, the reaction to its publication brought about savage reprisals against his family and, in one case, an attempt on Kosinski's life when he was living in New York.

'The Painted Bird' is a tale of a young boy, presumed to be Jewish or a Gypsy, who is abandoned by his parents

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during World War II and begins a nomadic life of solitude as he moves or is moved from many Slavic villages. Each time he thinks he has found a place of safety, he is then subjected to prejudice, abuse and experiences that leave him near to death from the actions of the occupants. This treatment stems from his background and the subsequent fear held by the villagers that harbouring anyone who may be a Gypsy or Jew will lead to reprisals from the occupying German army. One of the key aspects of this is that Kosinski is writing about a wholly adult subject from the perspective of one who is barely out of early childhood, therefore as the narrative develops each understated naivete is ripped away to reveal the harrowing truth lying just below the surface.

The first assistance that the child encounters (he remains anonymous throughout the entirety of the novel) is from an elderly woman known as 'Olga the Wise One' who buys him from a peasant who caught him trespassing on his farmland. She is one of the many unique portraits of rurality in 'The Painted Bird' since her wisdom is gained from an intimate knowledge of herbal medicines and superstitions that are reminiscent of medieval soothsayers. Although their dialects are different, this lingual boundary is overcome through a bond of trust and mutual admiration since she appears to be the only maternal figure in the novel who doesn't betray or abuse his lack of experience. One of the beauties of Kosinski's work is that the narrative exists as a framework for him to develop texts that appear extremely symbolic but still retain the readability that an audience desires. This is not, as some reviewers on other sites have labelled it, an excuse for abusing the extremities of violence. Whilst many may find some parts of it too near to the knuckle it is a beautifully composed piece of fiction that represents a writer with a devastating eye for detail and an uncanny ability to convey the discomfort of trying to survive on terra infirma.

As the novel progresses the conflict intensifies so this does seem to obey some parts of the historical timescale but there is also something Conradian about Kosinski's written style. Another reviewer made the link between both being Polish and both writing what is their 'foreign language' but this can be furthered since both 'Heart of Darkness' and 'The Painted Bird' are concerned with the effects of breakdown and chaos within the human when they are plunged into an alien environment. One of the most important questions that this poses concerns how a community should react when an outsider tries to enter into their midst. Should the community maintain its insularity and condemn this fellow human to its own battle for survival or should it embrace his plight and risk the violent prejudice of others? As the narrator is awakened to

the social nihilism that the war has created he finds that in order to continue living his own conduct must be adapted in order to fit in with those who seek to end his life. Indeed, when confronted by the trains heading to Auschwitz, this is the moment of true enlightenment for the child since it is this that is his antithesis, the 'Nazi mentality' that he has already experience and must endure until his true freedom is granted. Reading 'The Painted Bird' probably had more of an effect on me than anything by the highly reputable Holocaust writer, Primo Levi. It is brutal and disturbing but Kosinski correctly subscribes to the theory that when dealing with a raw subject matter such as this, subtlety cannot take precedence over vision and image.

In this case it is definitely justifiable to make the connection between writing and life. This novel is a fusion of exile, loss and survival written by an exile, about an exile which will leave the reader in no doubt about the capacity of inhumanity that people are able inflict upon each other when circumstances dictate it. Kosinski writes with a clarity and unflinching desire to make the reader understand the gravity of what they are witnessing. In many respects this is a novel that everyone should at least try to read since it is as relevant to our modern culture of violence and warfare as it was to the dispossessed nations of World War II. Unfortunately there's an infinite amount of praise and comment I could attribute to this masterpiece yet it is impossible to set everything down before it spirals out of control. Quite simply read this and accept that as much as we can imagine the persecution of Jewish and Gypsys, this will shatter the screen that looks back at us when we watch a documentary and in many respects it is something we should be thankful for. It is only a writer of Kosinski's experience and ability that could create a novel like 'The Painted Bird' and bring it off with such accomplished brilliance. As he is reported to have said in a newspaper interview: "Fiction does not teach, it is not didactic," fiction dramatizes you from within, the visual culture pacifies you from without. The principle of reading is the closest to the principle of having one's imagination revitalized. And that is life."

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From: btaverna@a...
Date: Tue Jul 10, 2001 3:20 am
Subject: Neighbors

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It has been on my mind all day.

Sixty years ago, the Jews of Jedwabne spent their last full day ali They probably enjoyed a warm summer day much as I did. Wives and mothers were undoubtedly busy cleaning, doing laundry, and planning meals if it not shabbos. Husbands and fathers were at work if it was a week day. Children...yes, innocent little children were undoubtedly happily playing outdoors in the sun. Older boys and girls were probably visiting, laughing and enjoying each other's company. Did anyone there know the depth evil lurking in their town?

When families gathered for their evening meal, the fears they may have discussed were of Nazis; perhaps the men tried to reassure their wives

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that
things might not be so bad..they would all be safe in their little out of the
way town. Mothers undoubtedly tucked their children into bed and sighed,
wondering what the future held for all of them. That horrible future was the
next day, July 10th, 1941. We all know what happened.

To the shame of Poland, there is now an inscription that says:

"In memory of Jews from Jedwabne and surrounding localities, to

men, women, and children - co-owners of this land, murdered and

burnt alive in this place on July 10, 1941."

So tomorrow a sham ceremony will acknowledge the monumental existence of
this inscription that in essence says.."some Jews were killed here...so what?
We do not choose to say how many, and we do not choose to say who killed
them...so what?" This is the best Poland will do. This is how Poland
acknowledges history it doesn't care to remember.

Well, I sadly observe many Jews have been killed by their "neighbors over
the years since Christianity began its persecutions. Other Jews have slept
restlessly in little towns all over Europe...and have awakened to the
knowledge of impending death. Many of those places do have plaques with
inscriptions that tell the truth, to the credit of the countries in which
they appear.

Poles like to remind us of 1000 years of Jewish presence there. We are aware
of it. They ask that we remember the good days too...they were long ago, yet
we are aware of them as well. They want us to remember the Polish Righteous
Gentiles, and those among them who were not afraid to step forward have been
acknowledged at Yad Vashem. Unfortunately though, we will also have to
remember Jedwabne, Radzilow and other places where "neighbors" killed,
innocent people. It will thus be difficult to reflect on the so-called

"goodness" of a country that refuses to look into the mirror because it is
afraid of what is there.

Barbara

**In Memory of the Jews of Jedwabne who were murdered by their Polish
Catholic neighbors on July 10, 1941. Know that your fellow Jews remember
you, and mourn you. We will not forget or forgive those who abandoned their
humanity and brought about your death, as well as those who seek to keep the
circumstances hidden. A higher power will judge them all.**

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From: "Vlady Rozenbaum" <wrozenba@e...>
Date: Tue Jun 5, 2001 9:29 pm
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Der Spiegel May 28, 2001

Poland: "The Perpetrators were Polish"

Awigdor Nielawicki, survivor of the pogrom of Jedwabne,
on anti-Semitism and collaboration in WW II.

Spiegel: You survived the pogrom of Jedwabne, where 60 years ago about 1,600 Jews were killed - by their own Polish people, which was revealed in the meantime. The crime is currently being examined by a special state commission in Warsaw. Have Polish lawyers contacted you yet to take your statement down?

Nielawicki: Yes, a lawyer called me to ask if I would come to Poland. I rejected. I left the country where I was born and almost burnt in 1945
and never returned. On the 15th of May I was supposed to make a statement at the Polish embassy here in Israel, but nobody has

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contacted me since.

Spiegel: The question is whether Germans motivated the Poles to the crime. Especially Polish historians still search for pieces of circumstantial evidence for a German perpetrator ship. What really happened?

N: I think it is horrible that many Polish people still don't admit to their country's anti-Semitic past. They have to understand: The perpetrators were Polish. They even came on the morning of the horrible
day of murder with their horse carts to loot the houses of the dead Jews right after the Pogrom.

And I say: There were even more than 2,000 dead on this day. If you add the number of Jewish families who were in Jedwabne on that day, next to the inhabitants also many refugees, you have to find out that the numbers since made public are too low.

Spiegel: How old were you then?

N: I was almost 16 years old and actually came from Wizna, a small village about ten kilometers from Jedwabne. When the Germans attacked the Russians on the 22nd of June in Eastern Poland, Wizna was bombarded from the air. The Jewish quarter burned. All families, including mine, left. We left with a horse cart. Towards evening we were
attacked by Polish bandits. They beat us and stole the few things we had
been able to save from the fire.

Spiegel: Were they just bandits or were they motivated by anti-Semitism?

N: They wanted our money and knew that nobody would punish them for their actions. After the invasion of the Germans we Jews became for the Polish, especially for the Nationalists, who hated Jews and Communists. Many of the thugs had just been released from jail by the Germans. Such former prisoners also killed my aunt's father, who didn't manage to flee.

Spiegel: Had the Germans motivated the perpetrators?

N: The Germans didn't need to. Besides, the Wehrmacht (German military in WW II) and SS hadn't invaded this part of Poland at that time. They came step by step in the following days. We had lost everything after the raid, so my father took me, my mother, and sisters
to an acquaintance, a Catholic inn owner, who hid us in his barn. But there we weren't safe from the Nationalists for a long time either, so we went back to Wizna to my grandfather's house, where a Polish family had already moved in, but they didn't betray us. A Jewish horse smith, about 75 years old, stayed in the inn. He said: "I know everybody
here, I have no fear". He was also beaten to death by released prisoners
after they had drunk. About a dozen Jews from Wizna were killed this way.

Spiegel: How was the relationship between Jews and the Catholic Polish in your village before the Germans invaded?

N: Not bad, but not good either. As a little boy I was fighting with the Polish boys more than I was playing with them. During the 30's the relationship got worse and worse. Most traders on Wizna's market

were Jews. More and more attacks happened, and booths were destroyed or raided. Behind it were often the followers of "Stronnictwo Narodowe", a right extremist party, who had also organized the boycott of Jewish stores since the 30's. There was even anti-Semitic cooperation in Wizna.
This way the Nationalists wanted to prevent the Polish to buy from Jews.
Therefore, the massacre of Jedwabne had a long prehistory. The perpetrators didn't fall from the sky. Professor Jan Tomasz Gross, who wrote a book about it is right when he says that the murderers were "neighbors".

Spiegel: Many Polish found this presentation of facts unfair because about 40,000 to 50,000 Jews were rescued by the Polish from the Nazis. In the Avenue of the Righteous of Yad Vashem many Polish names are listed.

N: I know that friends of my family were also hidden by Polish and were able to survive this way. But more died because of the Poles or with their help. Many Poles collaborated with the Germans. "Jews work, Jews work", this phrase, with which they got Jews out of their houses still sounds in my ears. Oftentimes German soldiers had Poles show them where the Jews lived. When I was driven into the Ghetto of Lomza in August 19 by the Germans, Poles were standing along the streets, teasing. The pulled our last belongings out of our hands. In the Ghetto they sometimes prevented us from picking up our rations of food or they threw the food on the ground, but the worst is: They killed my family.

Spiegel: How did it come to the massacre in Jedwabne?

N: We had fled to an uncle in Jedwabne. He was a miller. During the day we hid in the fields because everywhere were Poles who wanted to kill Jews, but also Germans. One evening the Polish daughter of our neighbors came to warn us: We would all get killed.

My parents had just left for our hometown Wizna, to get some money, so the next morning I fled into the fields myself. I wore three pants and three shirts at the same time, because the nights were cold. On the morning of the 10th of July I was discovered by Polish thugs, men about 20 years old, on a path in the field. I ran as fast as I could, but the many pants and shirts hindered me, so they caught me.

Spiegel: Were there Germans in Jedwabne?

N: Only a few cops. Several Jews, young men, worked for the police. The Poles called: "Give us the Jews", many witnesses reported. But the cops said: "No, we still need them." The Germans probably agree At the market place I didn't see any Germans.

Spiegel: All Jews were assembled at the market place. What happened there?

N: We were beaten by the Poles. They had bats, whips, and knifes. We

had to sing: "We wanted the war", we had to pull the grass out of the cracks in the street. I always remained in the center of the place, that's where I would get least beaten. The Rabbi was forced to wave a red flag. Others carried the Lenin statue, which the Russians had set up. I still see the hateful face of a farmer in the street when they dragged me into the village. She yelled: "Why didn't you finish the boy right away?"

Spiegel: How did you escape?

N: Suddenly I believed that I saw my mother, who was supposed to have returned that morning, but the woman was too far away and the crowd was too large. Then we were driven away from the village towards the barn I thought that if I kept walking with them I was certainly going to die. So I decided to flee in the fields.

Spiegel: That s where you were hiding?

N: Yes. There I was lying and crouching on the ground. I was waiting for the explosions and shots because Germans sometimes also had thrown hand grenades into Jewish homes. But it stayed quiet. Then I suddenly heard some sort of whining, which slowly got stronger, an unusual noise that like a wave drifted over the field. Today I know that these were the death prayers of the burning Jews. Then smoke clouds blew over the countryside. It smelled awful, like burnt cattle. When it smoked, the horse carts of the Polish started moving - to loot. But I thought: There's fire in the village, they have to extinguish the fire.

Spiegel: You couldn't imagine what really happened?

N: No, only at night, when a boy, who had also fled into the rye fields, told me what had happened.

Spiegel: Did you hear shooting?

N: No. Nobody was shooting. I know that they found bullet cases in Jedwabne. Interested Polish historians want to conclude that the Jews got shot. Then Germans would be the perpetrators. But that is not true. For a short time during WW I a German-Russian front line ran through Jedwabne. The remainders of ammunition may stem from this.

Spiegel: How did you survive the rest of the war?

N: I spoke Polish without any Yiddish accent. That saved my life. I met

Polish partisans in the woods from the AK, the army, who accepted me.

Spiegel: They thought you were really Polish?

N: Yes. I had even read their Catholic religion books. But there I couldn't
learn much, compared to Jewish books. Besides, I read: The Jews have killed Jesus. That's when I realized why they hated us.

Spiegel: Did the partisans see through your double role?

N: No, I was very careful because the soldiers also sang songs of mockery
about Jews.

Spiegel: The followers of the home army are seen as heroes of the resistance in Poland.

N: But among them there were also anti-Semites who killed Jews. Also two uncles of mine, who were hiding in the swamps by Klescze, were killed by partisans - "by our people", which I was told by inhabitants of the village later.

Spiegel: You made a statement about your experiences in Jedwabne in Bialystok still in the summer of 1945.

N: Yes, but my statements were later falsified. For example, I had declared how Germans, together with the Poles, went to hunt Jews. In the record, which I could only read a while ago, the part of the Poles wasn't even mentioned anymore. The collaboration was hushed up.

Spiegel: The Polish president Aleksander Kwasniewski wants to apologize on the 10th of July for the Jedwabne pogrom. Does that comfort you somewhat?

N: Words won't make my family come alive again.

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From: Sigmund Mittler <smittler@r >
Date: Wed Jul 4, 2001 4:28 am
Subject: ANOTHER POLISH POGROM : TYCOCIN POGROM

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Here is another Polish Pogrom: Tykocin Pogrom on August 25, 1941.
I am calling on historians to produce a book: " History of the Polish Pogroms"
The New Poland has to face their dark history in regard to the Polish-Jews.

Sigmund Mittler, M.D,
Professor

From Encyclopaedia Judaica

During the first days of the [German] occupation, a pogrom was conducted
by the Poles (with the
encouragement of the Germans), and Jewish property was looted. The Jews
were drafted for labor and freedom of movement was limited. On August 25, 1941, the Jews of the town were called to
assemble in the market square. After a Selektion, about 1,400 people were transported to large pits

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that had been prepared near the city [in the Lupochowo forest] and were
murdered. Some of the Jews
succeeded in hiding, but the next day they were caught and executed by
the Polish police. About 150
people found temporary shelter in the Bialystok ghetto and in the
surrounding townlets, later
perishing together with the members of those communities. After the war
a few of the survivors
returned to Tykocin, but they were subject to attacks by gangs of Polish
nationalists that were active
in the area; as a result, they left the city. A memorial book, Sefe
Tykocin, was published in Tel Aviv in
1949 (EJ 15, 1476).

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3622	Re: ANOTHER POLISH POGROM : TYCOCIN POGROM	Bob Solomon	Wed 7/4/2

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The Holocaust in Hungary, 1944: The Role of the Non-Jewish Hungarians

by
Megan Brady

1

On November 5, 2001, Center for Historical Studies Fellow Christian Gerlach of the University of Maryland presented his paper The Holocaust in Hungary, 1944: The Role of the Non-Jewish Hungarians. Explaining the Holocaust is a difficult task, as pinpointing exact motives and causes remains controversial. In his talk, Gerlach emphasized the context of Hungarian political interests and nationalism, discussing the latter in more detail than in his paper.

The case of the Hungarian Holocaust is unique within the general context of genocide. Between May and July 1944, the Hungarian government deported about 420,000 people to Auschwitz, of whom the Germans immediately killed 75%. This rate of mass murder is similar to the extreme case of Poland in the late summer and fall of 1942. As the killings occurred in the last year of the war, historians have typically emphasized the importance of Hungarian anti-Semitic ideology in the Ministry of the Interior and in the gendarmene to explain the rate and speed of the destruction of two thirds of Hungarian Jewry. Gerlach points out that the efficiency of the violence also necessitated more widespread domestic and political support for this to be possible. In his talk, he suggested that historians ought to examine the Hungarian political context and nationalism, both in relation to internal and external affairs.

MEANWHILE ▪ *By* Kati Marton

The hidden memory of a town in Hungary

NEW YORK

As we debate the proper way to remember Sept. 11, there are lessons for us from places that have lost their memories. I visited one recently: my mother's hometown in northeast Hungary, Miskolc.

I came in search of the grandparents I never knew — or some memory of their world. I do not know what they looked like because no photographs or any other possessions survived their arrest and transport to Auschwitz in 1944.

In fact, scarcely a trace is left of a Jewish community that once made up one quarter of Miskolc's population of 75,000 — vanished as if by some natural phenomenon. At least that is what Miskolc, a sullen, economically depressed place, might like to believe.

My grandparents' home, where my mother grew up, is now occupied by an insurance company. Standing frozen in front of it, I try to imagine what it was like on that early June morning (it was always early morning, that was Adolf Eichmann's way) when they began their final journey.

I have only the cold facts: The Miskolc town prefect, Emil Borbely-Maczky, with help from local citizens, supervised the roundup of 10,000 women, children and old men. (The young men had already been taken away to do forced labor.)

They were marched to the Auschwitz-bound wagons. Neighbors took their worldly goods. What personal property remained was transported to the synagogue, which was used as a warehouse for stolen Jewish property.

I had trouble finding the synagogue. The guidebooks do not mention it. The local residents I stopped on the streets told me they hadnever heard of any synagogue. Eventually, I found it.

There is no sign, no schedule of hours to mark the synagogue, only a giant padlock on the iron gate. At noon the pub across the street opened for business. "Do you know when the synagogue opens?" I ask the peroxide-blonde bartender.

"What synagogue?" she asks. "That one," I say pointing behind me.

"Really? That's a synagogue?" She seems startled. "Why don't you ask the neighbors?"

"You are the neighbors," I answer, suddenly angry.

I return to the synagogue and spot a buzzer just inside the padlocked gate. A middle-aged woman answers the bell. She looks annoyed. "I was just about to wash my hair," she says, fingering her long, bleached platinum tresses. I have come a very long way to visit this place, I tell her. My grandparents were deported from here. She shrugs, but opens the heavy gate.

The interior wall of the courtyard is crowded with marble plaques honoring "the innocent people" who were "deported in the most brutal and dehumanizing manner." The language is strong, even moving. But who sees these plaques behind locked gates?

As I walk the bleak streets of Miskolc, I scan the faces of passers-by. Where were your parents, what did they do before, during or after the disappearance of one quarter of your town's population? Were your parents my grandparents' neighbors?

I feel slightly ashamed for thinking that these people share a collective guilt. But I cannot help it. The town of Miskolc has buried its past and so cannot expect redemption.

Yet, even now, 58 years later, it is not too late for an honest reckoning. In neighboring Poland, local historians have recently concluded that the massacre of Jews in the town of Jedwabne in 1941 was carried out by Poles, not Nazis. This belated acknowledgment has already improved relations between Jews and Poles.

Miskolc is not unique in fleeing its history. There are many other places where great crimes were committed and then buried. Without memory, these places pay the price of collective guilt. And for the people themselves, there can be no reconciliation.

That is the bitter lesson of the age of genocide.

The writer is the author, most recently, of "Hidden Power: Presidential Marriages That Shaped Our History." She contributed this comment to The New York Times.

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